

presidents of the *United States of America*

"I served as the 27th President of the United States and am the only person to have been president and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court."



William Howard Taft



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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about William Howard Taft's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

President Taft owned two cows, and we need your help to find out what their names were! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them, and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

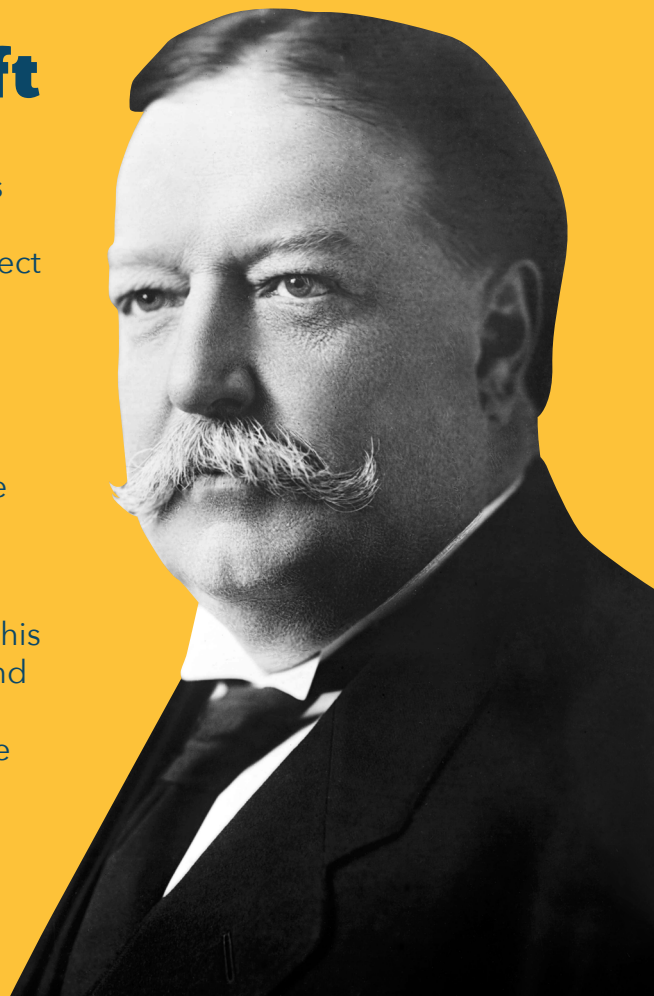
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet William Howard Taft

Have you ever loved something so much that you were willing to dedicate your whole life to supporting it? That's how William Howard Taft felt about the **Constitution**. He spent his entire career doing everything he could to protect the Constitution and obey its principles. He did this as a lawyer, a judge, and as president.

Most Americans remember Taft for being the heaviest president. At one point, he weighed about 350 pounds. There is even a myth that he got stuck in the White House bathtub. That myth, **h**owever, isn't true.

Taft deserves much more than to be remembered for his weight. He was a man of principle who never wavered in his belief in the **C**onstitution. He had an impressive career and is the only person in American history to serve as the President of the United States and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. No one else has served in these two positions—perhaps the most prestigious and important offices in the United States.

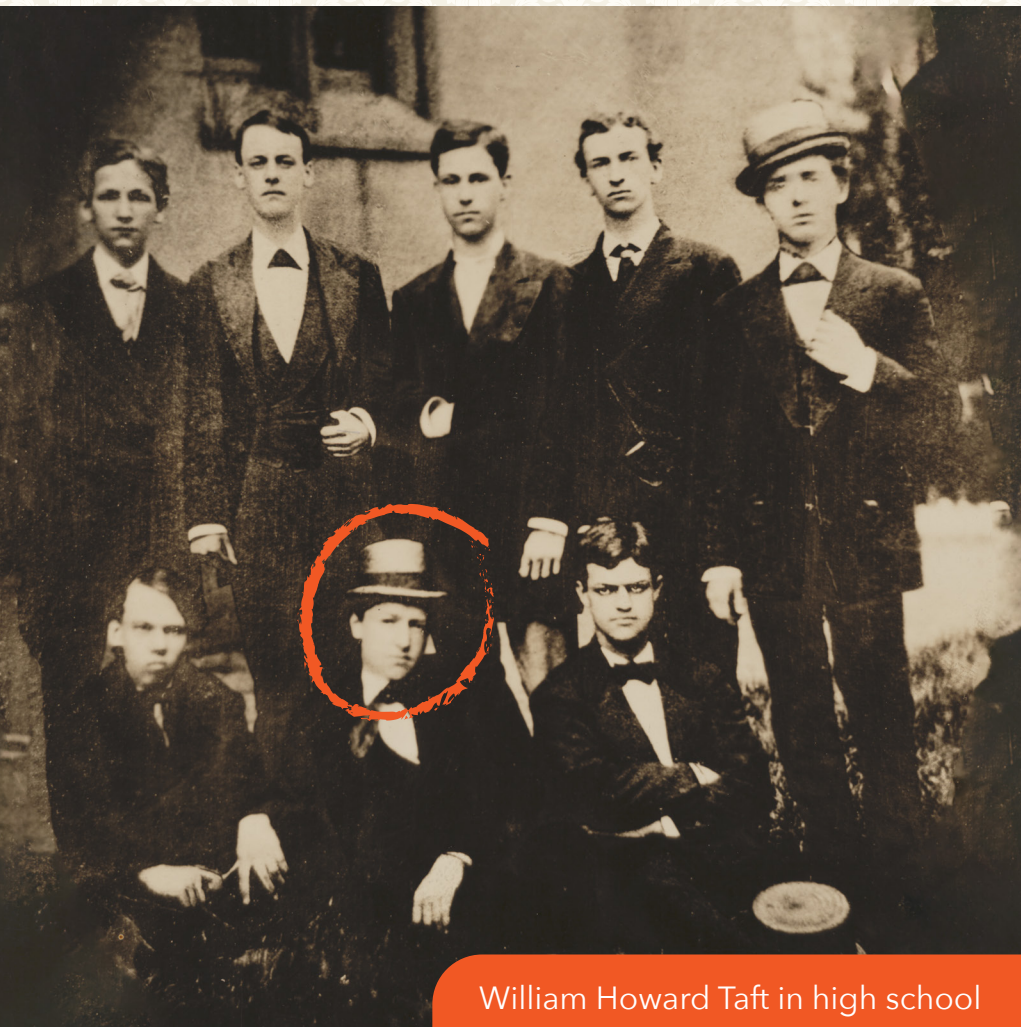


Young William

William Howard Taft was born on September 15, 1857. He was the second of Alphonso and Louise Taft's five children. Young William was an active child. He loved baseball and was a pretty good second baseman.

William looked up to his father. Alphonso Taft was a loyal Republican and a brilliant lawyer. He eventually became a judge and a member of President Ulysses S. Grant's Cabinet (as Secretary of War and Attorney General). Alphonso instilled in young William a respect for the Constitution, and the two spent hours talking about the law.

William attended Yale University, where he won the heavyweight wrestling championship and was known as an excellent debater. He graduated in 1878, second in his class. He then attended Cincinnati Law School, graduating in 1880.



William Howard Taft in high school

Interesting Facts

- He is the only person (as of 2023) to have served as the President of the United States and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
- He was a member of the Republican Party.
- He served as the Governor of the Philippines prior to becoming president.
- He was the first president to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at a baseball game.
- He is one of two presidents laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery (the other being John F. Kennedy).



President William Howard Taft Memorial Grave

Early Career

In the first few years of his career, he worked as a local **prosecutor** and a tax collector. In 1884, he saw something that he would never forget: after a jury in Cincinnati refused to hang a criminal, a large mob erupted in anger and burned down the local courthouse. Taft was appalled, and he forever feared mob rule. He felt that the Constitution provided the best system to prevent mob rule in the United States since it allowed Americans to deal with their disagreements peacefully.

Around this time, he met a teacher named Helen Herron, who was nicknamed Nellie. She was a strong-willed woman and even rejected his marriage proposal twice. For Taft, the third time was a charm, and they got married in June 1886. They eventually had three children.

The following year, Taft was appointed as a judge on the Ohio Superior Court at the age of just 29. His career continued to take off. President Benjamin Harrison then appointed him as the U.S. **Solicitor General** in 1890. Taft was very effective in this role and ended up arguing 18 cases before the nation's highest court—the **Supreme Court**—and winning 16 of them. During this time, he became friends with another young public official, the Civil Service Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1892, Taft returned to Ohio to serve as a federal judge for the Sixth Circuit. Taft loved being a judge, and he also served as a professor at Cincinnati Law School. Taft dreamed one day of becoming a judge on the Supreme Court.

Quote

*"Our international policy is always to promote peace."
- March 1909*





Philippine Governor

Taft's life took a completely new direction when, in 1900, President William McKinley asked him to go to **the Philippines**. The **United States** had just won the Spanish-American War and had taken over several Spanish territories, including the Philippine islands. Although the Americans and the Filipinos had fought against each other in an ugly conflict, McKinley believed that Taft, as a judge, could help establish a respect for the law on the lush, tropical islands. Taft reluctantly agreed, serving as Governor of the Philippines from 1901 to 1903.

The islands were a major change of scenery for Taft, but he successfully helped smooth over relations with the Filipinos. He treated the Filipinos with respect, built the country's infrastructure, and helped prepare them for **self-government**. When the new president, Theodore Roosevelt, tried to bring Taft back home, the Filipinos demanded that Taft remain as governor.



Rise to Power

Taft ended up returning to the United States to serve as Roosevelt's Secretary of War. Taft did a great job managing the War Department. Although Taft still dreamed of a job on the Supreme Court, Roosevelt had other plans. The President, who had taken office in 1901, was planning to leave the White House in 1909. He chose Taft as his successor for the 1908 presidential election. He hoped that Taft could continue his **progressive** policies. Nellie also preferred that her husband serve as president, rather than on the Supreme Court.

With the support of such a popular president as Roosevelt, Taft easily won the Republican nomination for president. He faced Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan. That fall, Taft defeated Bryan with ease, becoming the 27th **P**resident of the United States.

President

Taft served as president with integrity. He **had** a firm belief that the president must abide by the Constitution and respect the limits of his power. As president, Taft continued many of Roosevelt's policies. Like Roosevelt, he busted several **trusts**, believing that **monopolies** were harmful to the economy. He also supported **conservation**, and he set aside 8.5 million acres of land for federal protection. Taft's supporters pointed **out** that he busted more trusts than Roosevelt did. Unlike Roosevelt, however, he carried out these policies according to the process in the Constitution—by getting Congress's support rather than just making the law himself. This angered Roosevelt and his followers.

At the time, many progressives wanted Taft to be more aggressive like Roosevelt. Taft also didn't like being a political leader, giving speeches, and rallying support. For many Americans, Taft seemed more like a judge than a president.



Quote

*"We are all imperfect.
We can not expect
perfect government."
- May 1909*



1912 Presidential Election



Roosevelt was disappointed in Taft's policies. He challenged Taft for the Republican nomination in 1912. This angered Taft, and their friendship deteriorated. When Taft secured the nomination, Roosevelt started his own party, the Progressive Party, and ran as a third-party candidate. Meanwhile, the Democrats nominated another progressive, New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson.

The 1912 election was unusual because it featured an ex-president (Roosevelt), an **incumbent** president (Taft), and a

future president (Wilson). Roosevelt ran as a radical progressive, advocating for policies like universal healthcare and judicial recall: the ability of the voters to overturn a judge's decisions. Taft believed that this went against the principles of the Constitution. The Founding Fathers protected judges from what the people wanted, so they could focus instead on what the law says.

Roosevelt's campaign ended up splitting the Republican vote, handing Wilson the election. Taft finished third in the popular vote and Electoral College.



Baseball Fan

William Howard Taft was a lifelong baseball fan. He played baseball in his youth and started the presidential tradition of throwing the first pitch at a baseball game, which he did during a game in 1910 between the Washington Senators and the Philadelphia Athletics. His half-brother Charles even owned the Chicago Cubs and the Philadelphia Phillies.

According to legend, Taft also started another tradition by accident. During a game in Pittsburgh in 1910, Taft got up to stretch during the 7th inning. The crowd, mistakenly thinking Taft was getting up to leave, got up too out of respect but was surprised to see him sit down again. This is supposedly how the "7th inning stretch" was born.



Retirement

Although Taft was disappointed at the election result, he was glad to be out of the presidency. During his time in the White House, he had ballooned to 350 pounds. After leaving office, he went down to 270 pounds.

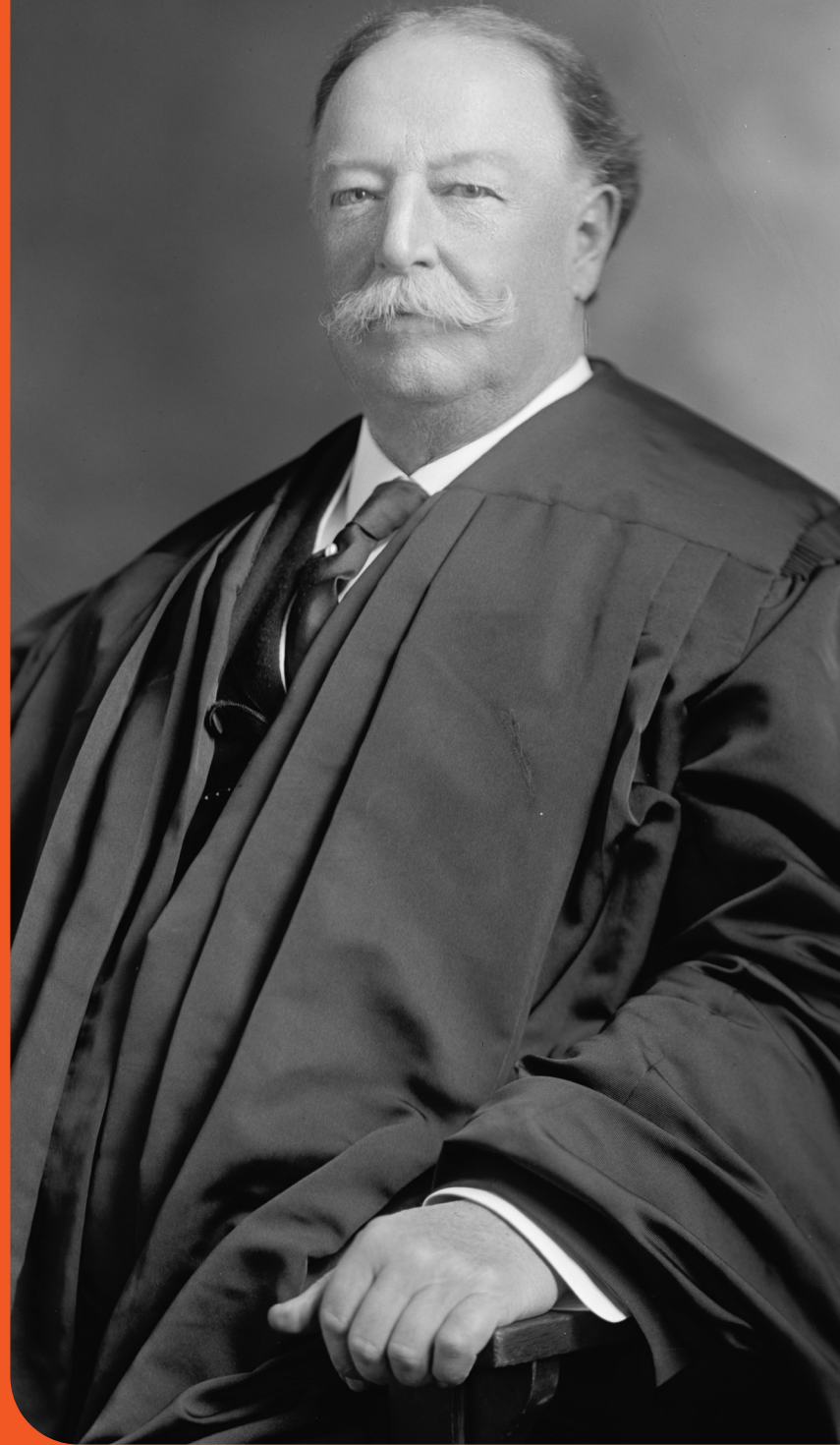
Taft got back to what he loved the most: the law. This time, he taught the law as a professor at Yale. The students loved learning from a former president.

Chief Justice

Taft finally attained his dream job when President Warren G. Harding appointed him the 10th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in June 1921. Taft wrote, "Next to my wife and children... [the Court] is the nearest thing to my heart in life. The truth is, I don't remember I was ever president."

Taft worked hard to establish the Court as a government branch equal to the executive and legislative branches. He worked to make it more efficient in delivering opinions and got the **Supreme Court Building** built. Originally, the Court met in the U.S. Capitol, where Congress assembled, but now it had its own home. Most importantly, in every case that came before the Court, Taft made sure to rule based on what he believed the Constitution said.

Taft was truly in his element, but it would not last forever. He suffered heart attacks in 1924 and 1926. With his health declining, he retired from the Court in February 1930. He died on March 8, 1930, at the age of 72.



Quote

*"Next to the right of liberty, the right of property is the most important individual right guaranteed by the Constitution."
- 1913*

The Taft Dynasty

America has many political dynasties, such as the Adamses, the Roosevelts, the Kennedys, and the Bushes. William Howard Taft is the most famous figure in another one of America's greatest dynasties. His father, Alphonso Taft, was a prominent Republican who served in Ulysses S. Grant's Cabinet. His son, Robert A. Taft, served as a senator and was a major leader among conservatives in the mid-20th century. One of his grandsons, Robert Taft Jr., served as a congressman and senator, while another, William Howard Taft III, was a diplomat. His great-grandson, William Howard Taft IV, has also served in government, including as acting Secretary of Defense and Ambassador to NATO.



Taft's son, Robert A. Taft

Quote

*"I am a man of peace and don't want to fight. But when I do fight I want to hit hard."
- May 1912*



Legacy

You could argue that the two most important people in the United States are the president and the Chief Justice. Remarkably, Taft has been the only person to attain both positions. He deserves to be remembered for this amazing feat.

Sadly, most Americans only remember him because of his weight. They forget that Taft was a well-respected public figure who was a brilliant legal thinker, a highly effective administrator, and a man of integrity.

It is true that he was not a skilled politician. He didn't enjoy giving speeches or convincing congressmen and senators to support his policies. This meant he wasn't the most effective president.

Still, Taft was an important American figure and did his best to defend the principles of the Constitution. During his lifetime, many progressives did their best to ignore the Constitution. Taft was one of the few brave men who fought for it and for the rights that it promises the American people.

Glossary

Constitution: The supreme law of the United States. It was drafted by many of the Founding Fathers during the Constitutional Convention from May to September 1787, and it took effect the following year. It lays out the structure of the federal government and, through the Bill of Rights, ensures that Americans' basic rights are protected.

Prosecutor: A person, often a lawyer, who officially accuses someone of committing a crime by bringing a case against that person in a court of law.

Solicitor General: The legal representative of the U.S. government for cases argued before the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court: The highest court in the United States and the head of the judicial branch in the federal government. The Court consists of nine associate justices, the highest ranking of which is the Chief Justice. The Court's main job is to interpret the Constitution and laws in the event of a legal dispute.

The Philippines: A country consisting of a group of islands in Southeast Asia. The islands were a colony of Spain from the 1500s to 1898 until the United States acquired them during the Spanish-American War. The United States granted the Philippines independence in 1946.

Self-Government: A government where the people in an area, region, state, or country govern themselves and are not controlled by any other outside government.

Progressive: A person who believes in replacing the Founding Fathers' principles with new ideas and a more powerful government.

Trust: A combination of powerful business interests or companies with significant influence over the market.

Monopoly: A situation where there is a single seller with no competition in the market. Many people believe this is harmful because the single seller can charge high prices on consumers and unfairly prevent other companies from competing.

Conservation: Policies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that aimed to protect nature, wildlife, and natural resources in the United States.

Incumbent: The person who is currently holding an office or position.

Supreme Court Building: The building in Washington, D.C., that houses the Supreme Court. It was built from 1932 to 1935.

Sources

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Rosen, Jeffrey. *William Howard Taft: The American Presidents Series: The 27th President, 1909-1913*. Times Books, 2018.

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Answers

NAMES OF TAFT'S COWS:
MOOLY WOOLY AND PAULINE

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