



The animosity between Taft and Roosevelt was such that if one was present in the Century when the other arrived, a hallman would apprise, say, Mr. Roosevelt, that Mr. Taft was in the West Room. The staff diligence was so good that the ex-presidents never collided at the Club.



William Howard Taft

27th U.S. President, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1857 – 1930)

Taft was born in Cincinnati into the powerful Taft family, the son of Alphonso Taft who served as Secretary of War under President Ulysses S. Grant. Taft graduated from Yale in 1878, and from Cincinnati Law School in 1880. He was appointed a judge to the Ohio Superior Court in 1887, and then to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in 1891.

In 1900, President William McKinley appointed Taft Governor-General of the Philippines, which had been ceded to the U.S. by Spain. As Governor-General, the rotund Taft once sent a telegram to Washington that read, “Went on a horse ride today; feeling good.” Secretary of War ELIHU ROOT replied, “How’s the horse?” In 1904, Roosevelt appointed Taft to succeed Root.

After serving for nearly two full terms, Roosevelt declined to run in the election of 1908 and supported Taft, who won an easy victory over William Jennings Bryan. In his only term, he emphasized trust-busting as a main issue, supported by his Attorney General GEORGE W. WICKERSHAM. He strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission, improved the performance of the postal service, and helped the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment. In 1910, Taft, an ardent baseball fan, inaugurated a presidential tradition by throwing out the first ball at the Washington Senators opener. [His half brother Charles Phelps Taft later purchased the Chicago Cubs.]

Taft made six appointments to the Supreme Court including Edward Douglas White and CHARLES EVANS HUGHES. With these two Taft essentially ap-

pointed both his predecessor and successor Chief Justices, respectively. White was named Chief Justice in 1910. Hughes later resigned to run as the Republican Party’s presidential candidate in the 1916 election, which he would lose. President HERBERT HOOVER nominated Hughes to the Court as Chief Justice following Taft’s retirement.

Near the end of Taft’s first term, Roosevelt turned on his former protégé in one of the most dramatic political feuds of the 20th century. But Taft outmaneuvered the popular Roosevelt and seized control of the GOP. Taft had the backing of many former Roosevelt boosters, including ELIHU ROOT, HENRY L. STIMSON, and Roosevelt’s own son-in-law, Nicholas Longworth. Out of the 14 Republican primaries held, Roosevelt won nine, and Taft won just three. Robert LaFollette won the other two. Still, Taft won the nomination at the convention.

Roosevelt was forced to create the Progressive Party (or “Bull Moose”) ticket, splitting the Republican vote in the 1912 race, allowing WOODROW WILSON’s election. Taft won just the eight electoral votes of Utah and Vermont, making it the single worst defeat in history for an incumbent president seeking reelection.

Taft served as a law professor at Yale until President Harding made him Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, a position he held until just before his death in 1930. To Taft, the appointment was his greatest honor; he wrote, “I don’t remember that I was ever President.”