

## This Day in History... October 2, 1871

# Happy Birthday Cordell Hull

America's longest-serving secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was born on October 2, 1871, in Olympus, Overton County (now Pickett County), Tennessee.

As a child, Hull attended classes at a one-room schoolhouse built by his father. An excellent speaker from a young age, Hull delivered his first public speech at the age of 16. By the time he was 19, Hull was elected chairman of the Clay County Democratic Party. Meanwhile, he also attended Cumberland School of Law, where he graduated in 1891 and was then admitted to the bar.

Hull then began practicing law and won a seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives, where he served from 1893 to 1897. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, Hull left his political posts to serve as a captain in the Fourth Regiment of the Tennessee Volunteer Infantry. When the war was over, he returned to practicing law.

In 1903, Hull was appointed a judge in the Fifth Judicial District. From that point on many people, even his eventual wife, called him "Judge." Hull worked as a judge until 1907 when he was elected to Congress from the Fourth Tennessee District. He went on to serve 22 years in the House of Representatives. During a break in this service, he also spent two years as chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

As a member of Congress, Hull served on the Ways and Means Committee, working to lower tariffs. He also wrote the income tax laws of 1913 and 1916 and the inheritance tax law of 1916.

Gaining popularity within his party, Hull was among the top candidates at the 1928 Democratic National Convention. Though Hull wasn't nominated, he went on to earn a seat in the Senate in 1930.

Then, in 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt appointed Hull to serve as his secretary of State. One of his first tasks was leading the American delegation to the London Economic Conference that year. Though that conference was considered a failure, Hull went on to head the American delegates at the seventh Pan-American Conference. There, he won the trust of Latin American diplomats and laid the groundwork for a good neighbor policy with 22 American nations.

*From the Prominent Americans Series*



Following the Trade Agreements Act of 1934, Hull negotiated a number of reciprocal trade agreements with other nations that both lowered tariffs and increased trade.

In 1937, Hull acted swiftly after New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia publicly stated that Nazis, including Hitler, should be featured in a chamber of horrors at the upcoming World's Fair. The Nazi government was outraged and called him a criminal. To smooth things over on the world stage, Hull sent a letter to Berlin, expressing his regret over the situation, but also explaining that such statements were not illegal in the US.

In the years leading up to World War II, Hull foresaw the brewing conflict and worked with other nations to try to prevent it. Many credit his good neighbor policy with Latin American nations with preventing the Nazis from infiltrating that region. He also maintained relations with Vichy France.

In November 1941, Hull sent Japan the Outline of Proposed Basis for Agreement Between the United States and Japan, also known as the Hull note. Among its contents, the note required Japan to withdraw all of its troops from French Indochina and China. Unfortunately, the Japanese prime minister saw the note as an ultimatum. A Japanese strike force had already left for Pearl Harbor the day before, and the Japanese government had no wish call them back and concede to Hull's demands. On December 7, 1941, Hull received a 14-part message from the Japanese government telling him of the breakdown of the negotiations. Hull responded angrily, "In all my fifty years of public service, I have never seen such a document that was more crowded with infamous falsehood and distortion."

The following year, Hull led the Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy. One of his greatest accomplishments came in 1943. Hull worked with President Roosevelt to create an international organization to prevent a third world war. He and his staff then wrote the Charter of the United Nations. However, his health was beginning to decline and he opted to resign his position in November 1944. Serving 11 years and nine months, he was America's longest-serving secretary of State. When he resigned, President Roosevelt called him, "the one person in all the world who has done his most to make this great plan for peace (the United Nations) an effective fact."

In spite of his failing health, Hull insisted on attending the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in 1945, serving as senior adviser to the American delegation. Because of his efforts, he's often called the "Father of the United Nations." For his role in the creation of the UN as well as his peace efforts and trade agreements, Hull was awarded the 1945 Nobel Peace Prize. At the ceremony, the chairman of the Nobel Committee said, "Cordell Hull has devoted his entire life to the stabilization of international relations. ... No foreign minister can have held office in more difficult times. ... Yet Hull never gave up, despite opposition both at home and abroad." Though Hull was unable to attend due to his health, he sent a 718-word acceptance speech to be read by the US ambassador to Norway.

After years of health issues, Hull died on July 23, 1955. A number of places have been named in his honor including a dam and lake in Tennessee, a speaker's forum at his former law school, a birthplace state park, a section of highway, and a state office building in Tennessee.



*Issued days after Hull's 92nd birthday.*



*Issued for the 50th anniversary of the Pan-American Union.*



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