

## SECTION 10

# PRESIDENTS AND POLITICS

1876-1900

The first national political parties date back to 1792.

Today's major parties, however, started later—  
the Democratic Party began in 1828;  
the Republican Party began in 1854.

Major political parties seemed out of touch with the problems of industrialization,  
thus giving rise to radical third party movements.

The Populist party, formed in 1892 by farmers who felt left behind by industrialization,  
made a strong showing in the 1890s, as did the Socialist party in the early 1900s.

In 1880 Thomas Nast, cartoonist for the *Harper's Weekly*,  
created the donkey and elephant as cartoon symbols representing the  
Democratic and Republican parties. They continue to be used today as party symbols.  
Thomas Nast also created Uncle Sam.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY  
1828







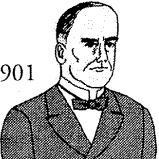


REPUBLICAN PARTY  
1854



## Chapter 10-1 ★ THE WHITEHOUSE: HAYS TO MCKINLEY, 1877-1901

The Republican party dominated the White House during the Gilded Age. Five of the presidents elected between 1877 and 1900 were Republicans. Grover Cleveland, the only Democrat, had a split term. He won elections in 1884 and 1892. National political contests, however, were close. None of the presidents won a majority of the popular vote, and neither of the parties controlled the executive and legislative branches simultaneously. Four of the presidents were from Ohio.

PRESIDENTS, Vice Presidents	Political Party	Birthplace, Marriage, Home	Education	Civil War Military Service	Career
 1877-1881 <b>RUTHERFORD B. HAYES</b> William A. Wheeler	Republican	b. Delaware, Ohio m. Lucy Webb, 1852; 8 children Cincinnati, Ohio	Kenyon College Harvard Law School graduate	Brevet major general, Union Army	Lawyer, City Solicitor, Cincinnati Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives, e. 1864 Governor of Ohio, e. 1867 President of the U.S., e. 1876
 1881-1881 <b>JAMES A. GARFIELD</b> Chester A. Arthur	Republican	b. Orange, Ohio m. Lucretia Rudolph, 1858, 7 children Cleveland, Ohio	Geauga Academy Hiram College Williams College graduate	Major general, Union Army	Professor and President, Williams College Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives, e. 1862; served 9 terms President of the U.S., e. 1880 Assassinated in office, 1881
 1881-1885 <b>CHESTER A. ARTHUR</b> (no Vice President)	Republican	b. Fairfield, Vermont m. Ellen Herndon, 1859; 3 children New York City, NY	Union College graduate	None	Lawyer Inspector general of the New York militia Collector of the Port of New York, appointed 1871 President of the U.S., e. 1881
 1885-1889 <b>GROVER CLEVELAND</b> Thomas A. Hendricks	Democrat	b. Caldwell, New Jersey m. Frances Folsom, 1886; 5 children Buffalo, New York	Attended schools in Fayetteville and Clinton, NY, until age 14. Studied law as a clerk in law office	Did not serve. Paid a substitute to take his place in order to help support his mother and siblings.	Lawyer Sheriff, Erie Co., NY Mayor of Buffalo, NY, e. 1881 Governor of NY, e. 1882 President of the U.S., e. 1884 and 1892
 1889-1893 <b>BENJAMIN HARRISON</b> Levi Morton	Republican	b. North Bend, Ohio m. Caroline Scott, 1853; 2 children Indianapolis, IN	Farmers' College Miami University graduate	Brigadier general, Union Army	Lawyer City Attorney, Indianapolis Reporter of State Supreme Ct. President of the U.S., e. 1888
 1893-1897 <b>GROVER CLEVELAND</b> Adlai Stevenson	Democrat	(see above)	(see above)	(see above)	Lawyer Sheriff, Erie Co., NY Mayor of Buffalo, NY, e. 1881 Governor of NY, e. 1882 President of the U.S., e. 1884 and 1892
 1897-1901 <b>WILLIAM MCKINLEY</b> Theodore Roosevelt	Republican	b. Niles, Ohio m. Ida Saxton, 1871; 2 children Canton, Ohio	Allegheny College (attended briefly before illness forced his departure)	Brevet major, Union Army Served under Rutherford B. Hayes.	Lawyer Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives, e. 1876; served 7 terms Governor of Ohio, e. 1891 President of the U.S., e. 1896



## THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

was organized in 1854 by northern businessmen and western farmers who united on a single issue: opposition to the extension of slavery in the western territories.

Led by President Abraham Lincoln, the party won the Civil War and abolished slavery—and lost its main issue.

What would be the Republican party's postwar issues?

- ◆ High tariffs, hard money, and strong banks, demanded by northern businessmen and industrialists
- ◆ Federal aid to railroads, demanded by western farmers



## THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY,

composed mostly of agrarian southerners who had seceded from the Union and some northeasterners, had emerged from the Civil War tainted with disloyalty.

What would be the Democratic party's postwar issues?

- ◆ Low tariffs, demanded by southern agrarians and northeastern international businessmen
- ◆ Soft (paper) money, demanded by southern agrarians

### CIVIL SERVICE

Employees working for the federal government are said to be in the "civil service." Since the 1820s most were appointed through patronage—a reward for political support, called the "spoils system."

Both parties paid lip service to the need for reform—a merit system of appointments, but held on to the power of patronage.

The results were:

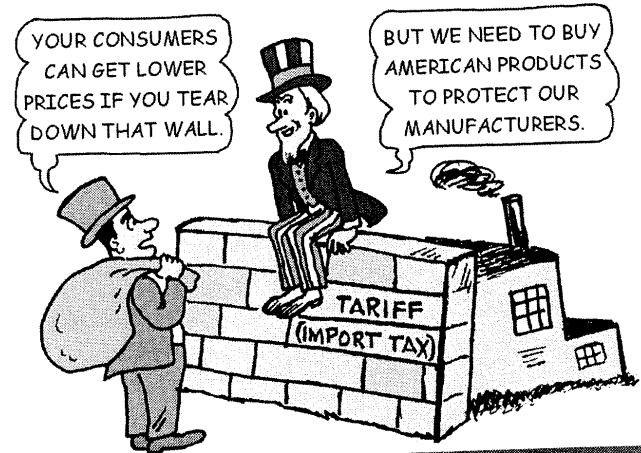
- ◆ Incompetent office holders
- ◆ Assessment of campaign contributions from office holders
- ◆ The president's loss of time in dealing with office seekers.



### TARIFFS

During the Civil War Republicans took advantage of the absence of southern Democrats in Congress to pass high tariffs which protected northern manufacturers from competitive foreign goods. (A tariff is a tax on imported goods. It raises the cost of goods, and this cost is passed on to consumers.)

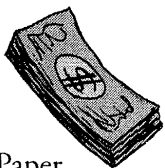
Consumers protested high prices, and Democratic farmers protested that they received no comparable price supports. They sold their crops in an open, unprotected market.



### CURRENCY

**The silver question:** In 1873 Congress passed the Coinage Act, which eliminated the silver dollar from the list of official coins and made gold the legal currency.

The Coinage Act enraged southern farmers, often forced into debt by low crop prices, because it forced debtors to repay loans with expensive currency. Owners of western silver mines also protested the "Crime of '73," as they called it.



Paper  
(soft money)



Metal: silver  
(hard money)



Metal: gold  
(hard money)

### VETERANS' PENSIONS

Union veterans of the Civil War organized into the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and lobbied for high pensions. By 1890 they were 409,000 strong.

They often tried to sway elections in favor of Republicans by

"wrapping themselves in the flag," reminding voters of the Democratic South's rebellion against the Union and the Republicans' obligation to increase Union veterans pensions.





**RUTHERFORD B. HAYES**  
19th President, 1877-1881

**Honesty:** This was Rutherford B. Hayes' outstanding trait, and it helped the former Ohio governor win the Republican party's presidential nomination in 1876. Ironically, he became known as "his fraudulency" and served only one term. How did this happen?

Hayes (1822-1893), born in Delaware, Ohio, had an outstanding background. After earning degrees at Kenyon College and Harvard Law School, he practiced law in Cincinnati and served as city solicitor. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the 23rd Ohio Volunteers and rose to the rank of major general. He was wounded several times.

Hayes entered politics after the war as a moderate Republican. He served in the House of Representatives (1864-67) and then won three elections as governor of Ohio (1867, 1869, 1875). While governor, he gained national attention as a gold standard advocate.

### THE ELECTION OF 1876: HIGH STAKES FOR BOTH PARTIES

#### Republicans



stood to lose the 1876 election because of their legacy of corruption and scandal from President Ulysses S. Grant's administration. Grant, a strong Civil War general, had been a weak president (1869-77) subject to manipulation by Congress. Honest himself, he proved oblivious to the political corruption of his appointees.

#### Democrats



stood to regain the presidency after 20 years of Republican dominance. Their strategy: a candidate with a record of fighting corruption.

Their choice: New York Governor Samuel J. Tilden, who had broken up William "Boss" Tweed's corrupt political machine, Tammany Hall, in New York City.

### DISPUTED ELECTION RETURNS AND A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Tilden appeared to be the presidential winner with a popular-vote margin of 250,000 and—more important—184 electoral votes to Hayes' 165.

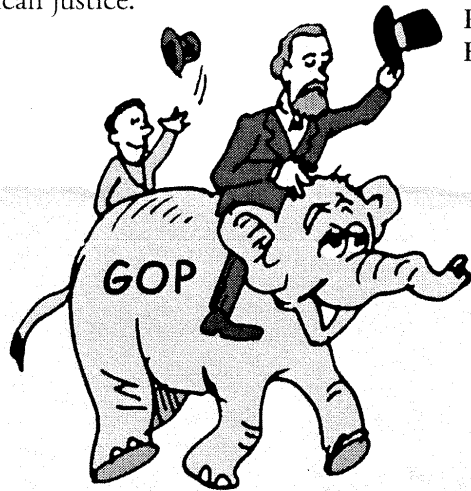
However, 20 electoral votes (only one of which Tilden needed for a majority) were in dispute after Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana each submitted two sets of election returns and Oregon illegally replaced a Republican elector with a Democratic one.

How could this be resolved?



To resolve the dilemma Congress established an Electoral Commission of 15 members: 5 Supreme Court justices (two from each party and one Independent) and 5 members each from the House and the Senate.

All seemed fair, with 7 Democrats, 7 Republicans, and 1 Independent—until Judge David Davis, the Independent, resigned to enter the Senate and was replaced by a Republican justice.



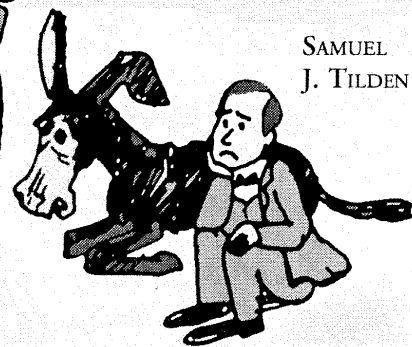
RUTHERFORD B.  
HAYES



The Commission declared Hayes president by a partisan vote of 8 to 7. Democrats agreed to accept the decision in return for three promises from the Republicans:

- ◆ End Reconstruction by withdrawing federal troops from the South.
- ◆ Appoint at least one southerner to the Cabinet.
- ◆ Fund internal improvements in the South

Led by Hayes, the Republicans kept their promises.



SAMUEL  
J. TILDEN

## THE HAYES ADMINISTRATION

### FEDERAL INTERVENTION IN THE 1877 RAILROAD STRIKE

In July 1877, a strike by workers on the B&O Railroad claimed Hayes' attention. The strike spread rapidly, affecting two-thirds of the nation's railroads.

At the request of four state governors, Hayes sent federal troops to stop the strike and restore order. This action set a precedent for government intervention in labor disputes.

Labor union members resented Hayes' action and became more open to third-party movements.



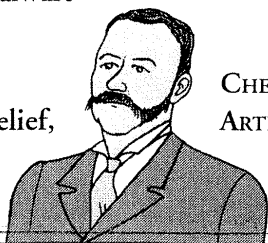
### CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

Hayes set out to end the spoils system but was unable to get reform legislation through Congress.

He caused a rift between Republican factions—"Half-breeds," who were fellow party reformers, and "Stalwarts," the party regulars—when he removed from office Chester A. Arthur, collector of the port of New York. Arthur had used his office to solicit support for his Stalwart friend, U.S. Senator

Roscoe Conkling.

To Hayes' shocked disbelief, Arthur would become president in 1881.



CHESTER A.  
ARTHUR

### IMPACT OF THE HAYES ADMINISTRATION

Hayes, a cautious man, downplayed tariffs, supporting them more in principle than in practice.

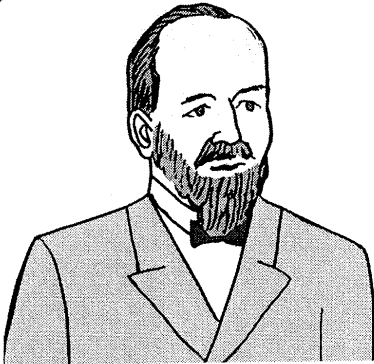
A fiscal conservative, he was more assertive in regard to currency, supporting the resumption of gold payments in 1879 and vetoing the Bland-Allison Act that allowed for unlimited coinage of silver.

Overall, Hayes was a well-meaning but weak president, more a caretaker than leader. His greatest contribution was in restoring integrity to the White House.

Hayes chose not to run for re-election. The job was not for him. In 1879, near the end of his term, he stated, "I am thoroughly tired of this life of bondage, responsibility and toil."

## 10-5 ★ JAMES A. GARFIELD: THE CIVIL SERVICE CRISIS

"Some civil service reform will come by necessity after the wearisome years of wasted Presidents have paved the way for it."—James A. Garfield, 1881



**JAMES A. GARFIELD**  
20th President, 1881-1881

**James A. Garfield (1831-1882)** the last president to be born in a log cabin—in Orange, Ohio—was a 6-foot tall, handsome, intelligent man who rose from poverty to become a college president at age 26 (Western Reserve Eclectic Institute) and United States president at age 50.

Garfield, like other Gilded Age presidents, showed little joy in being president. Foreseeing gloom, he told friends that he expected his happy life to come to an end with his election. It did.

No one can know Garfield's effectiveness as the 20th president of the United States because a hostile office-seeker shot him four months after his inauguration, and he died September 19, 1881.

Garfield's death motivated Congress finally to pass civil service legislation and curb the spoils system that led to Garfield's assassination.

### THE 1880 ELECTION

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY was divided into two factions as it met to nominate a candidate in Chicago.

**Stalwarts**, led by Roscoe Conkling, were conservative, anti-reform Republicans who supported Ulysses S. Grant for an unprecedented third term—despite the corruption of Grant's previous administrations.

**Half-Breeds**, led by James G. Blaine, were moderate Republicans open to some reform. They supported Blaine as the Republican nominee for president.

The convention deadlocked, and on the 34th ballot nominated James A. Garfield, a Half-Breed.

Then, to placate Stalwarts, the convention chose Chester A. Arthur, a Stalwart, as its vice presidential nominee.

Garfield defeated Democrat Winfield Scott to become the 20th president.



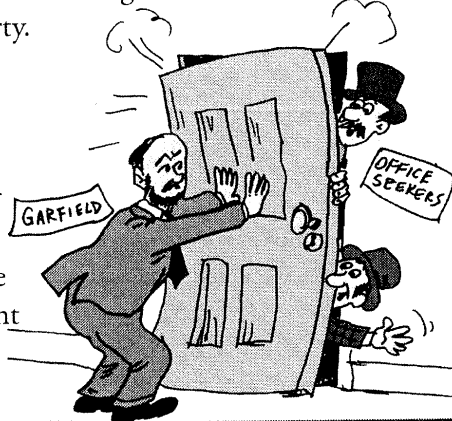
### THE WOEFUL SPOILS SYSTEM

The spoils system, appointing one's friends and supporters to public office—as favors or in return for favors—regardless of merit, turned thousands of government workers out of office with each new presidential administration.

Garfield's brief tenure was consumed by filling these jobs. He was successful in a power struggle for patronage with Republican Stalwart Roscoe Conkling and ended the Stalwart grip on the Republican party.

Garfield said, "I felt like crying out in the agony of my soul against the greed for office and its consumption of my time."

"What is there in this place that a man should ever want to get into it?"



### GARFIELD'S ASSASSINATION

On July 2, 1881, President Garfield walked through a Washington railroad station on his way to a college reunion. Charles Guiteau, a deranged Stalwart whom Garfield had refused to appoint as United States consul in Paris, shot Garfield and shouted:

"I am a Stalwart and Arthur is president now."

Guiteau was arrested immediately. He was convicted of murder and hanged in 1882.

Chester A. Arthur now became president. What would this Stalwart, a staunch practitioner of the spoils system, do about reforming civil service?

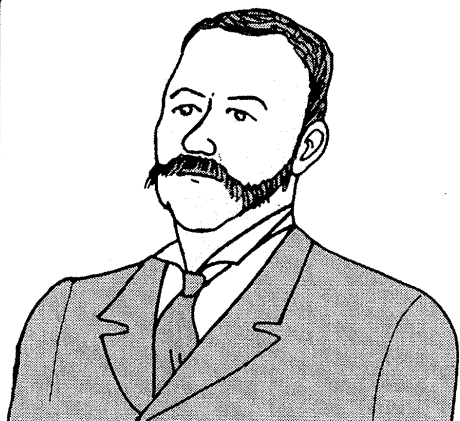


## 10-6 ★ CHESTER A. ARTHUR, 1881-1885

"I have but one annoyance with the administration of President Arthur, and that is, that in contrast with it, the administration of Hayes becomes respectable, if not heroic."

—Roscoe Conkling, New York Republican party boss—a Stalwart

"No man ever entered the Presidency so profoundly and widely distrusted, and no one ever retired... more generally respected."—Alexander K. McClure



**CHESTER A. ARTHUR**  
21st President, 1881-1885

"Oh, no! Not Chet Arthur!" So exclaimed one dismayed American, joined by a host of others. While true that Arthur had little political stature when chosen vice president, he showed unexpected strength as president.

Before coming to the White House he had been a follower of Roscoe Conkling, New York's powerful political boss, and had run the New York customhouse through the spoils system. But as president he surprised everyone, especially Conkling, by shunning party politics and supporting the new Civil Service Commission authorized by the 1883 Pendleton Act.

Although lauded as a fair and hard-working president, Arthur was not nominated for election in his own right in 1884.

### "ELEGANT ARTHUR"

President Arthur quickly earned the nickname "Elegant Arthur." He was a handsome man and a fastidious dresser whose wardrobe included some 80 pairs of pants. He changed clothes for every occasion. He came to the White House a widower, his wife having died in 1880. His sister served as his official hostess. A man of fine taste, he thought the White House looked like a "badly kept barracks," and he ordered a three-month, \$30,000 renovation by Louis Tiffany. Here he enjoyed late night suppers with friends, lasting until the early morning hours.

### CONSCIENTIOUS AND UNINSPIRING

Chester Arthur had never held elective office before becoming vice president. He had no political support base and little power.

He fought for lower tariffs, but Congress raised them.

He vetoed an expensive water project, but Congress overrode his veto.

He vetoed a bill prohibiting Chinese immigration for 20 years. Congress passed it by amending the years to 10.

He had some success in modernizing the navy.

### CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

Arthur's outstanding achievement as president was his active support of civil service legislation. Given his background as a machine politician, no one expected it.

On January 16, 1883, Arthur signed the Pendleton Act creating the modern civil service system, based on merit. And he enforced it.

Provisions of the Pendleton Act follow on the next page.

### A ONE-TERM PRESIDENT

When Arthur signed the Civil Service Act, he signed away his chance of nomination for the presidency in his own right. In 1884 his Stalwart associates said, "No more."

But no matter. Arthur had known since a year after becoming president that he had a fatal kidney disease. He died in 1886.

Arthur deserves credit for rising to the occasion of his accidental presidency and promoting the Pendleton Act. One of the most democratic laws of the land, it is called the "Magna Carta of Civil Service."

**Public reaction to Garfield's assassination** by a disappointed office seeker pressured Congress to pass the Pendleton Act on January 16, 1883.

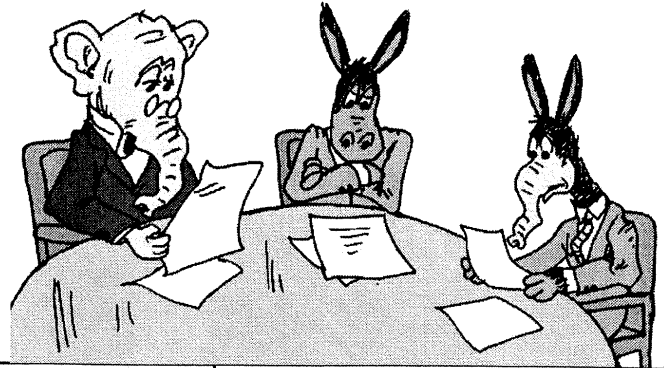
The Act replaced the spoils system of appointing office-holders on a reward-for-political-support basis, with a merit system based on examinations.

The Act put only 10 percent of the approximately 150,000 federal jobs on the "classified" list of civil service jobs. Presidents, however, were authorized to expand the list, and by 1900 the figure rose to about 50 percent. By the twenty-first century, federal jobs numbered almost three million, with most of them classified as civil service.

The Pendleton Civil Service Act reduced the power of political machines, diminished patronage-related corruption, and created a more competent federal bureaucracy.

### A BIPARTISAN CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

The Pendleton Act established the United States Civil Service Commission (now called the Office of Personnel Management), a bipartisan group of three, to provide for "open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service now classified or to be classified hereunder...."



### COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS

The examinations are practical and related to the job being sought.



### JOBS AWARDED ON MERIT

SORRY--SHE SCORED HIGHER THAN YOU. BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME.



### TRIAL PERIOD BEFORE FINAL JOB CONFIRMATION



### NO SOLICITING FOR POLITICAL SUPPORT



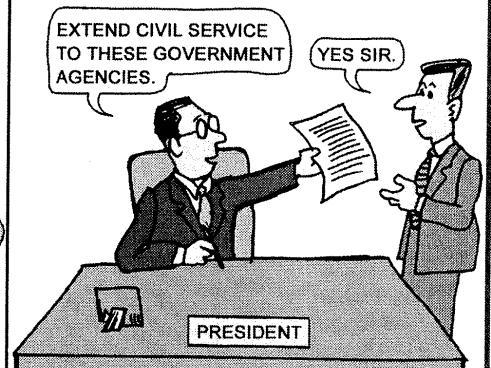
### CAN'T BE FIRED FOR POLITICAL REASONS

SO I DIDN'T VOTE FOR WHAT'S-HIS-NAME. YOU CAN'T FIRE ME FOR THAT!



### PRESIDENTIAL EXTENSION OF CIVIL SERVICE LIST

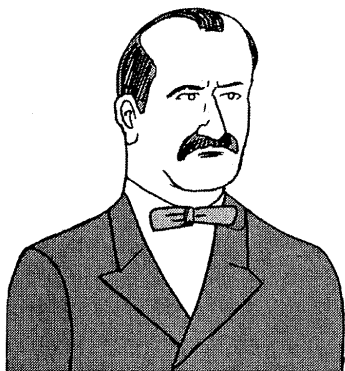
Expanding the classified list was admirable but risky for presidents. They might alienate party members who benefitted from patronage.





## 10-8 ★ GROVER CLEVELAND, 1885-1889

“The lessons of paternalism ought to be unlearned and the better lesson taught that while the people should patriotically and cheerfully support their Government, its functions do not include the support of the people....”—Grover Cleveland



**GROVER CLEVELAND**  
22nd President, 1885-1889  
(24th President, 1893-1897)

Grover Cleveland was the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms. He also was the first Democrat elected since before the Civil War. A conservative, he believed in limited government and thus did not favor the Interstate Commerce Act passed during his administration.

Cleveland came to the White House with a sterling reputation for honesty and efficiency, earned as Governor of New York. Because of these traits he won the votes of “Mugwumps,” a group of independent Republicans who bolted their party to support him. Cleveland was blunt and principled. “I’d rather be right than president,” he said when he took unpopular positions.

Cleveland did take unpopular positions by favoring a low tariff to resolve a \$1,000,000 treasury surplus and by taking a hard line on veterans’ demands. He suffered the consequences, including defeat for re-election in 1888.

### CLEVELAND’S POST-CIVIL WAR PROBLEMS

#### APPOINTMENTS

Cleveland believed that the country needed to move past bitter post-Civil War feelings. Therefore, he appointed southerners to his cabinet and to foreign ministries. His reward was to be called a rebel sympathizer.



#### VETERANS’ PENSION PETITIONS

Pensions paid to Union veterans had risen from \$15 million in 1866 to \$56 million in 1885. And the pension rolls had risen to 350,000.

Cleveland vetoed 233 pension petitions. With each review he lost time, and with each veto he lost political favor with the powerful veterans’ lobby, the Grand Army of the Republic.

But then, as he always said, “I’d rather be right than president.”

#### RAILROAD REGULATION

In 1886 a conservative Supreme Court began overturning state laws regulating railroads.

Farm organizations, claiming discriminatory railroad rates for small shippers, such as farmers, demanded federal regulation of railroads based on the commerce clause.



#### INTERSTATE COMMERCE ACT, 1887

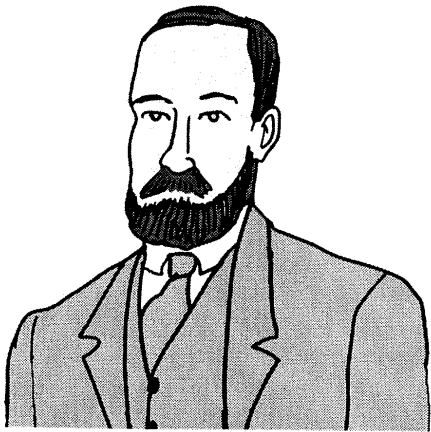
In 1887, in response to recommendations from a Senate investigating committee, Congress passed the Interstate Commerce Act, the first federal law regulating business.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS AIDED BUSINESS. FROM NOW ON, IT WILL REGULATE IT AS WELL.



It required railroads to publically post “just and reasonable rates,” and it prohibited rebates and pooling.

The act proved ineffective because the commission created to enforce the act had little power.



**BENJAMIN HARRISON**  
23rd President, 1889-1893

Benjamin Harrison, five feet six inches tall, was the grandson of William Henry Harrison, ninth president of the United States. He was the last president to wear a full beard.

Known as the “iceberg president,” Benjamin Harrison’s reserve contributed to a lackluster presidency, sandwiched between Grover Cleveland’s two administrations. Yet he was respected for his intelligence, honesty, and strong sense of duty. He admired Patrick Henry and was himself an outstanding speaker.

During the Civil War Harrison served the Union as a distinguished brigadier general. He gave insight into his temperament with a self-description: “I am not a Julius Caesar, nor a Napoleon, but a plain Hoosier colonel, with no more relish for a fight than for a good breakfast and hardly so much.”

### SHERMAN ANTITRUST ACT, 1890

Responding to fears about the growth of monopolies and trusts, Congress passed a law prohibiting business combinations “in restraint of trade or commerce.”



Because of vague language, the act was rarely enforced until the administration of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909). Trusts had little to worry about at first.



### VETERANS' PENSIONS

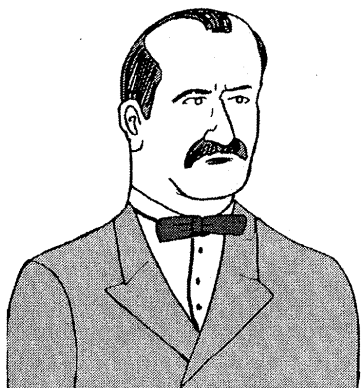
Unlike Grover Cleveland, who paid a substitute to take his place in the Union army, former Brigadier General Harrison favored the pension petitions of his fellow veterans. He championed the 1890 Dependent and Disability Pensions Act which extended benefits to veterans disabled from non-military causes and to veterans' dependents.

“God help the surplus,” said Pension Commissioner James Tanner. During Harrison’s term, pensions increased from \$81 million to \$135 million. The result: Congress passed the nation’s first billion dollar budget and was called “the billion dollar Congress.”

### THE MCKINLEY TARIFF, 1890

Sponsored by Republican Representative William McKinley, this protectionist tariff was the highest ever in peacetime. Consumer prices skyrocketed, and voters responded in 1892 by once again electing a low-tariff man to the presidency: Grover Cleveland.





**GROVER CLEVELAND**  
(22nd President, 1885-1889)  
24th President, 1893-1897

Grover Cleveland defeated Benjamin Harrison in the 1892 election. However, the Populist party candidate, James B. Weaver (about whom you will read in the next section), won 22 electoral votes, the strongest record of any third party candidate. Weaver ran on a radical platform of government ownership of the telegraph, telephone, and railroads; a graduated income tax; and free coinage of silver.

Cleveland's second term began with the financial panic of 1893. It continued through four years of depression, which Democrats blamed on the high McKinley Tariff and the inflationary Silver Purchase Act of 1890.

Cleveland believed in the gold standard and secured repeal of the Silver Purchase Act. This caused a split between silver and gold Democrats, which contributed to Republican William McKinley's election in 1896.

### DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

#### COXEY'S ARMY, 1894

Cleveland did little to fight the depression that began in 1893. As a conservative he did not believe in federal aid for economic problems, such as unemployment.

He ignored Ohio businessman Jacob S.

Coxey's proposal that the government authorize printing \$500 million in paper money to put men to work building roads.

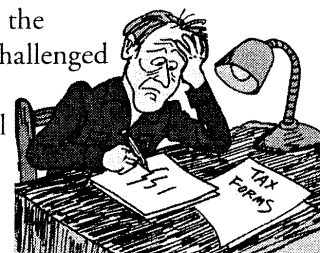
In 1894 Coxey's "Army of the Unemployed," 500 strong, marched on Washington D.C., to make their case. Coxey was arrested and sentenced to 20 days in jail for trespassing on the Capitol lawn. Though failing his mission, he spotlighted Cleveland's lack of aid.

#### 1894: A TWO PERCENT INCOME TAX—UNCONSTITUTIONAL?

In 1894 Congressman William L. Wilson introduced a tariff reform bill that lowered tariff rates. To compensate for the expected loss of revenue, the House Ways and Means Committee added a surprising measure: a two percent income tax on incomes greater than \$4,000.

When the bill reached the Senate, 600 amendments raised the tariff rates dramatically. Even so, it became law with the compensating income tax intact. Opponents challenged the tax as communistic. In 1895 the Supreme Court declared the income tax unconstitutional because it was a direct tax not apportioned according to the population of each state.

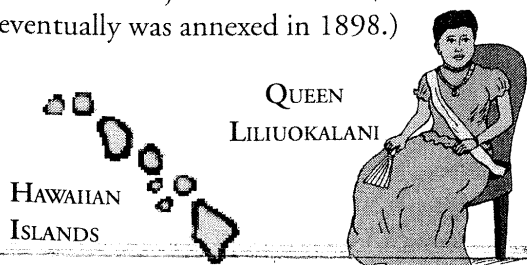
Farmers, advocates of the income tax as an alternative to high tariffs, denounced the Court's decision. Many joined the new Populist party which called for a graduated income tax.



### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

#### HAWAIIAN ANNEXATION REJECTED

In 1893 Cleveland alienated global expansionists who wanted to annex Hawaii. He condemned the role of Americans who had supported an overthrow of Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani. Therefore, he withdrew from consideration the treaty for Hawaiian annexation submitted earlier to President Benjamin Harrison. (Hawaii eventually was annexed in 1898.)



#### VENEZUELAN BOUNDARY DISPUTE, 1895

A gold strike on the Venezuelan-British Guiana border revived an 1814 boundary dispute between the two South American countries. The United States accepted Venezuela's request to arbitrate, but Great Britain refused arbitration. Cleveland interpreted the refusal as a threat to the territory of a Latin American country, thus a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. On July 20, 1895, the United States warned of "grave consequences" unless the British agreed to arbitration. Could this mean war?

The British responded that the Monroe Doctrine was not involved and neither should the U.S. be involved. They backed down and agreed to arbitration after Cleveland won congressional approval to appoint a boundary commission and enforce its findings. In 1899 a Paris tribunal decided the dispute in Great Britain's favor.

The incident strengthened the Monroe Doctrine—impressing European powers and alarming Latin American countries.