

President	Grover Cleveland
Chronological Order	22
Life Span	1837-1908
Home State	New York
Elected	1884 (first term)

Political Party	Democratic
Vice President	Thomas A. Hendricks
First Lady	Frances Folsom Cleveland
Children	2 sons, 3 daughters

Physical Attributes 5'11" tall, 260 lbs., bull neck, thick torso, huge hands, mustache, brown hair, blue eyes

Undergraduate Education None

Military Service None

Profession Attorney

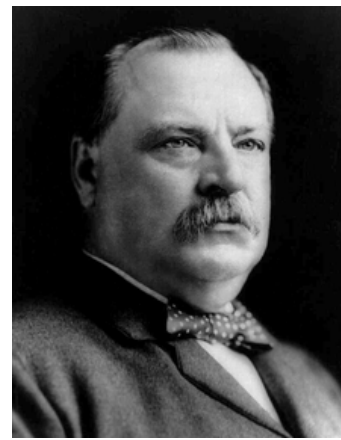
Political Offices Governor

Nickname His Obstinacy or Uncle Jumbo

Family Lineage English, Anglo-Irish, German

ReligiousAffiliation Presbyterian

- Biographical Notes
1. Cleveland was honest, self-reliant, and extremely diligent. He preferred to do essential tasks himself instead of delegating them and often worked deep into the night. He and McKinley are generally considered the ablest presidents of the period between Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. When he came into office, he had no "program" except a commitment to honesty and efficiency and an intention to staff his administration with worthy people, mostly Democrats. Over time, Cleveland came to favor lowering the tariff and using the gold standard for currency instead of bimetallism. He considered his role as president to be that of a righteous watchdog, ensuring a fair field for all and favors for none. Thus, he opposed special benefits for industry, for war veterans, and for railroads at a time when special treatment was considered routine. In foreign policy, he was an anti-imperialist at a time when a significant portion of the American public was in favor of acquiring new territory. He is the only president to serve two non-consecutive terms.
 2. Physically, Cleveland was a big man: 5' 11" tall, 260 pounds, with a bull neck, thick torso, and huge ham-like fists. His nieces and nephews used to call him "Uncle Jumbo." At a time when most significant politicians, including three of the last four presidents, wore beards, he preferred the more modern look of just a mustache. He enjoyed hunting and fishing. Once Cleveland made up his mind on an issue, it was hard to change it, which led to one of his nicknames, "His Obstinacy."
 3. Cleveland was born in Caldwell, New Jersey, the fifth of nine children. His family moved to upstate New York before he was five. His father was a Yale graduate ordained into the Presbyterian ministry at the Princeton Theological Seminary. After his father died in 1853, it became necessary for the sixteen-year-old Grover to end his formal education and begin work. In 1855, he moved to his uncle's cattle farm near Buffalo. His uncle arranged for him to study law at the Rogers, Bowen, and Rogers law firm – President Fillmore's old firm. He was admitted to the bar in 1859 at the age of twenty-two.
 4. Cleveland did not serve in the military during the Civil War. He stayed at home to support two of his sisters and his mother, while two of his brothers entered the military (the third was a minister). When drafted, he made use of a provision in the Conscription Act of 1863 that allowed him to hire a substitute (for



\$150) to serve in his place. Hiring a replacement did not hurt him during the presidential election campaign of 1884 because his opponent had done the same.

5. As a young lawyer, Cleveland became known for his thorough preparation of cases. He also became active in Democratic politics in Buffalo and was elected sheriff of Erie County in 1870. During his two years in office, Cleveland eliminated routine graft and earned a reputation of incorruptibility that would follow him throughout his political career. As sheriff, he refused to pass on to others the unpleasant responsibilities of his office, and twice as prisoners stood on the gallows, he pulled the lever sending them to their death. Political foes gave him the nickname "Buffalo Hangman." After his term as sheriff, he returned to the private practice of law and built a very successful firm.

6. Maria Halpin was an attractive young widow who moved to Buffalo in 1871. For a time, she accepted the attentions of several men, including Cleveland. When a son was born in 1874, she named the child Oscar Folsom Cleveland and claimed that Grover was the father. Cleveland did not know if he was the father and never acknowledged the child as his, but he agreed to provide some financial support for the boy. Those closest to Cleveland believed that Ms. Halpin was uncertain who the father was; that she chose Grover because she hoped to make him marry her; and that Grover did not refute her accusation because the other men involved were married, including his former law partner Oscar Folsom.

Eventually, Halpin began drinking heavily and neglecting the child. Alarmed, Cleveland had his friend, Roswell L. Burrows, a county judge, look into the matter. After investigating, Burrows had Halpin committed to the Providence Asylum, an institution for the mentally deranged, where she stayed for a short time. The little boy was sent to the Protestant Orphan Asylum, where Cleveland paid his board (\$5 per month). Cleveland also persuaded Halpin to leave town, setting her up in business in nearby Niagara Falls.

Pining for her son, Halpin returned to Buffalo in 1876 and kidnapped the boy from the orphanage after failing to recover him legally. Judge Burrow again intervened, and the boy was returned to the orphanage. Oscar was adopted by a respectable family and became a distinguished professional man.

7. Cleveland returned to politics by winning the race for mayor of Buffalo in 1881. In his acceptance speech, he emphasized that the city should be able to conduct its affairs with the same efficiency as a private business – without graft and corruption. As mayor, he lived up to this ideal, exposing a plot to overcharge the city \$100,000 on a construction project and refusing to grease palms for the building of a new sewer system. His efforts against the spoils system made him an enemy of Tammany Hall, the powerful Democratic spoilsman organization. While mayor, Cleveland stated that "Good and pure government lies at the foundation of the wealth and progress of every community." This idea became the central theme of his career.

8. In 1882, there was strong sentiment against the spoils system as a result of Garfield's assassination by a deranged spoilsman. As a result, even though he had been mayor for only one year, Cleveland was chosen as the Democratic nominee for governor. The Republican candidate, Charles J. Folger, was a decent man personally but owed his nomination to the Republican spoilsmen, Roscoe Conkling and Jay Gould. Cleveland crushed Folger in the general election by approximately 192,000 votes, the largest margin in the history of the state up to that time.

9. During his two-year term as governor, Cleveland became known for using his veto power to affect legislation. For example, he sent the legislature eight vetoes during his first two months in office to oppose needless spending.

His first veto to attract widespread attention was his rejection of a bill to reduce the fares on New York City elevated trains (the city's first mass transit, preceding the subway). The railway was privately owned and operated by robber baron Jay Gould. Given the popular appeal of cutting prices and the contempt in which Gould was held, there was widespread bipartisan support for the bill. Cleveland did not like Gould and conceded the desirability of lowering the fares for commuters. However, he saw the bill as unjust – Gould had taken over the railroads when they were failing and made the system solvent again. Moreover, Cleveland believed that altering Gould's franchise would violate Article I of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits states from passing "any law impairing the obligation of contracts."

As governor, Cleveland's stand against political corruption won him widespread acclaim and the hostility of the influential Tammany Hall organization of New York City. Tammany had disapproved of Cleveland's nomination for governor, and their resistance intensified after he openly opposed and prevented the reelection of their point man in the state Senate. Cleveland also steadfastly opposed nominees of the

Tammanyites, as well as bills passed as a result of their deal-making. The loss of Tammany's support was offset by the support of reform-minded Republicans who helped him pass several laws that improved municipal governments.

10. As governor, Cleveland sometimes collaborated with a young, reform-minded Republican state assemblyman, Theodore Roosevelt of New York City. In particular, Grover signed a civil service reform bill championed by Roosevelt.

That does not mean that the relationship between the two men was always smooth. Once, Cleveland decided to veto a series of bills Roosevelt had introduced to make structural changes in the government of New York City. The two men did not disagree on the substance of the bills; Cleveland vetoed them because they were poorly written. (For example, the package specified two different term lengths for the same office.)

Roosevelt stormed into Cleveland's office and bellowed, "You must not veto these bills! You cannot! You shall not! I can't have it, and I won't have it!"

Cleveland raised his meaty right hand in the air, clenched it into a fist, slammed it down on the desk with a bang, and then stated, "Mr. Roosevelt, I *am* going to veto those bills!" Roosevelt fell back into his chair, then excused himself. Cleveland's chief aide, who had witnessed the encounter, turned and looked out the window, so Cleveland would not see the broad smile on his face.

11. By 1884, Cleveland had built a national reputation for honesty, integrity, and having his constituents' best interests in mind. Given the political climate of the time, this made him a possible presidential candidate a mere three years after his election as mayor of Buffalo.

In 1884, the Republican Party held its national convention before the Democrats and nominated Senator James G. Blaine of Maine for president. Blaine was tainted by a corruption scandal in which he took a kickback from a railroad company, which alienated the GOP's Mugwump faction. (The Mugwumps strongly opposed corruption.) In addition, the Stalwart faction of the GOP – led by Blaine's archenemy Roscoe Conkling – refused to support Blaine because of his opposition to the spoils system. As a result of these two defections, Democratic leaders believed that they had an excellent opportunity to win the White House for the first time since 1856 if they could choose the right man.

At the 1884 Democratic National Convention, there were three leading candidates for the presidential nomination: Cleveland, Senator Thomas Bayard of Delaware, and former Senator Allen Thurman of Ohio. All three men had weaknesses. Tammany Hall opposed Cleveland, which actually helped him with some of the other delegates. Bayard had spoken in favor of secession in 1861. Thurman was well-liked but was growing old and infirmed, and his views on the silver question were unclear.

On the first ballot, the tally was: Cleveland 393, Bayard 170, Thurman 88, and scattered votes for other candidates. Cleveland achieved the necessary two-thirds majority on the second ballot.

12. The presidential election of 1884 against Republican James G. Blaine was fought more on personal issues than on programs or platforms. Blaine's vulnerability was the so-called Mulligan letters. They showed that while Speaker of the House, he did a valuable favor for the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad and was rewarded with a secret arrangement to sell the bonds of the line at a handsome commission. Blaine ended one of the letters with the command, "Burn this letter." Democratic crowds loved to chant:

*Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine,
The continental liar from the state of Maine.
Burn this letter!*

Cleveland's vulnerability was his private life, in particular the fact that he might have fathered an out-of-wedlock child with Maria Halpin. Republican crowds began chanting:

*Ma! Ma! Where's my Pa?
Gone to the White House,
Ha! Ha! Ha!*

When a campaign aide asked him what the Democrats' response should be, Cleveland said, "Tell the truth." The general public appreciated his honesty and overlooked his indiscretion. Cleveland's three-word answer remains to this day the gold standard for a politician caught in an embarrassing predicament.

13. The Wednesday before election day was a double disaster for the Blaine campaign. At a rally in New York City, one of the speakers before Blaine labeled the Democrats the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion," and Blaine did not have the presence of mind to repudiate the statement. Irish voters, who were predominantly Roman Catholics, were enraged when they read this comment in newspapers the next day because it associated them with drunkenness and treason. On Sunday, Catholic churches throughout New York state received handbills pointing this out.

In addition, Blaine hosted a "Prosperity Dinner" at Delmonico's in Manhattan Wednesday night for two hundred of the wealthiest men in the country. The lavish affair was criticized as inappropriate because the economy was in a recession, and many people had lost their jobs.

Blaine was so eager to win the vote in New York that he even asked his old nemesis, former U.S. Senator Roscoe Conkling, for his help. Conkling's scathing reply was: "I do not engage in criminal practices."

14. On election day, Cleveland carried the Solid South, the border states, Indiana, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Blaine did well in New England, the Midwest, and the West. The election result hinged on New York, where the outcome was in dispute for several days, and a recount was ordered. How much skullduggery may have taken place in New York is unknowable. In the end, Cleveland won New York (and its 36 electoral votes) by a margin of 1,149 votes out of more than 1.1 million votes cast, i.e., by 0.10 percent. The tally in the electoral college was Cleveland 219, Blaine 182.

15. Cleveland selected all Democrats for his cabinet. He chose: for State, Thomas F. Bayard of Delaware; for Treasury, Daniel Manning of New York; for Interior, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar of Mississippi; for War, William C. Endicott of Massachusetts; for Navy William C. Whitney of New York; for Attorney General, Augustus H. Garland of Arkansas; for Postmaster General, William F. Vilas of Wisconsin.

Manning was a close friend of Cleveland's from his days as governor. He had opinions on the tariff and the necessity of America's retention of the gold standard that agreed with Cleveland's views. Whitney was a gifted political operator who later helped Cleveland get the 1892 Democratic nomination for president and ran his successful general election campaign. Lamar was a former lieutenant colonel in the Confederate Army, and Garland had served in both houses of the Confederate Congress. Cleveland included them in his cabinet to help reintegrate the South back into national politics. These appointments enraged the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) – a politically potent fraternal organization of several hundred thousand Union Civil War veterans, predominantly Republicans. At the time, the initials G.A.R. were humorously interpreted to mean "Generally All Republicans."

16. Cleveland also clashed with the G.A.R. over pensions for Union Civil War veterans. If the Pensions Bureau rejected an application, the claimant could appeal to his congressman, who, mindful of the political power of the G.A.R., would often present a special pension bill to Congress.

Congress passed hundreds of these private pension bills and sent them to the White House. Cleveland read these bills carefully, vetoed several hundred of them, and laboriously penned individual veto messages to Congress. He also signed hundreds of these bills but got little credit for doing so.

17. During the election of 1884, Cleveland courted Frances Folsom, the beautiful twenty-year-old daughter of his former law partner Oscar Folsom. They were married two years later in the White House after she graduated from college.

Frances, who at twenty-one was the youngest First Lady in American history, enjoyed her role as White House hostess and was enormously popular with the public. Indeed, her effect on Washington would be unrivaled until Jacqueline Kennedy's tenure almost eighty years later. William H. Crook, a staffer for every president from Abraham Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt, wrote in his memoirs, "Mrs. Grover Cleveland was the most charming woman and the most lovely character that I have known in the course of my life. When one remembers that in addition to this, she was physically beautiful, one can easily understand her extraordinary influence upon all who saw her."

18. As for civil service, Cleveland was a moderate reformer who had faith in the merit system. He believed that "a public office is a public trust." Reformers complained that he did not push reform enough; Democrats felt that he did not replace enough Republicans.

19. During the Civil War, Congress doubled the average tariff rate to raise revenue, primarily to pay for the war. American industry, which was mostly Republican, had profited from the protection these high rates

provided and did not want to see them reduced in peacetime. Since tariffs usually are shouldered off onto the consumers by manufacturers in the form of increased prices, Cleveland concluded that a high tariff taxed the many for the benefit of the few. Consequently, he became an advocate for lower tariffs. In December 1887, he took the unprecedented step of devoting his entire Annual Message to Congress to this subject. (Since World War II, this message is known as the State of the Union Address.) His language made Republicans furious and gave them a campaign issue for 1888. A bill that lowered the tariff passed in the House, but died in committee in the Republican-controlled Senate.

20. Two factors contributed significantly to Cleveland's defeat in 1888: the Murchison affair and the tariff issue. The Murchison affair was an elaborate con in which a California Republican, using the false name Charles F. Murchison, pretended to be a British immigrant and wrote the British ambassador to the U.S., asking him how he should vote in the election. A seasoned politician would have known to avoid commenting on such a sensitive issue. But the ambassador – a political novice – replied that England would prefer the election of Cleveland. The ambassador's letter was leaked to the press two weeks before the election and hurt Cleveland with the Irish and anti-British vote, especially in New York, where the election would be decided.

A second factor was his drive to lower tariffs. This infuriated industrialists and large corporations, and they made significant donations that allowed the Republican Party to build up a vast war chest. Some of this money, in fact, a larger amount than was typical, was used to buy votes, especially in Indiana.

On election day, Cleveland won the popular vote by a plurality of slightly more than 100,000 votes out of 11 million. However, Harrison won New York (36 electoral votes) by one percent, and the electoral college by 233 to 168 votes. If Cleveland had won New York (his home state), he would have won the election.

21. Before Cleveland left office, an international incident almost flared into war. Back in 1878, the U.S. signed a treaty with Samoa that promised that America would act as a mediator in case Samoa became entangled in a dispute with a foreign power. In December 1888, Germany clashed with Samoa at a time when three German, one British, and three American warships were in Samoa. War with Germany was averted when the German chancellor Otto Von Bismarck invited the other two powers to Berlin to discuss the issue.

22. Cleveland's first term, on the whole, was a success. He displayed a rare degree of courage, honesty, and concern for the public welfare. Among other laudable achievements, he retrieved for the government 81 million acres of the public domain that, in many cases, had been improperly acquired by the "cattle barons" and railroads. He also pushed the construction of a new steel navy even more energetically than his predecessor had. His administration could claim two legislative landmarks for 1887: the Dawes Act, designed to help the Indians, and the Interstate Commerce Act, designed to curb the railroads.

23. When Frances Cleveland left the White House in 1889, she asked a favorite servant to take good care of the furniture and ornaments in the house, because "We are coming back, just four years from today." She was right.

24. Cleveland was very different from his predecessor, Chester Arthur. Cleveland dressed plainly, ate simple meals, and did not draw attention to himself. Arthur was an epicurean notorious for his designer clothes (he owned eighty pairs of pants), his taste for gourmet meals (he installed a French chef in the White House), and for riding around Washington in a lavish monogrammed carriage. Arthur had refused to move into the White House until it underwent a comprehensive renovation supervised by the renowned interior decorator Louis Comfort Tiffany. Cleveland could not have cared less about the White House décor.

The difference between the two men was not just stylistic. Cleveland began work each day at 8 a.m. and often worked until 2 a.m. Arthur rarely got to the office before 10 a.m. and was usually gone before 5 p.m. Cleveland did not have a staff; he had only one person, Dan Lamont, to help him with his everyday responsibilities. This changed drastically under his successor, William McKinley, who had a large staff and an extensive communications team to help manage the Spanish-American War and keep track of American armed forces in Cuba and the Pacific.

See the next page for a list of references.

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