

Continuity and Change in American History

The Historical Context of the 22nd and 24th and the 45th and 47th Presidents of the United States Grover Cleveland and Donald Trump

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Source

Grover Cleveland was born in Caldwell, New Jersey, He is the first president to be elected to two non-consecutive terms of office; Donald Trump is the second president to be elected to two non-consecutive terms of office. The presidential election of 1884 might be considered a turning point in American politics as Grover Cleveland was the first Democratic Party president in 25 years, since the Civil War. The Republican Party candidate in 1884 was James Blaine from Maine who was associated with corruption and liberal Republicans supported Cleveland over loyalty to their party. Although Grover Cleveland, a bachelor, fathered a child out of wedlock and avoided the army during the Civil War, the majority of Protestant clergy supported him and his policies. [Digital History](#)

On March 4, 1885 Grover Cleveland was inaugurated as the 25th president of the United States. Eight months later his vice-president, Thomas Hendricks died. Within three months, Congress passed the Presidential Succession Act, which continued for over 60 years. This act provided a continuing line of people from the Cabinet to become president and vice-president in the event of a vacancy.

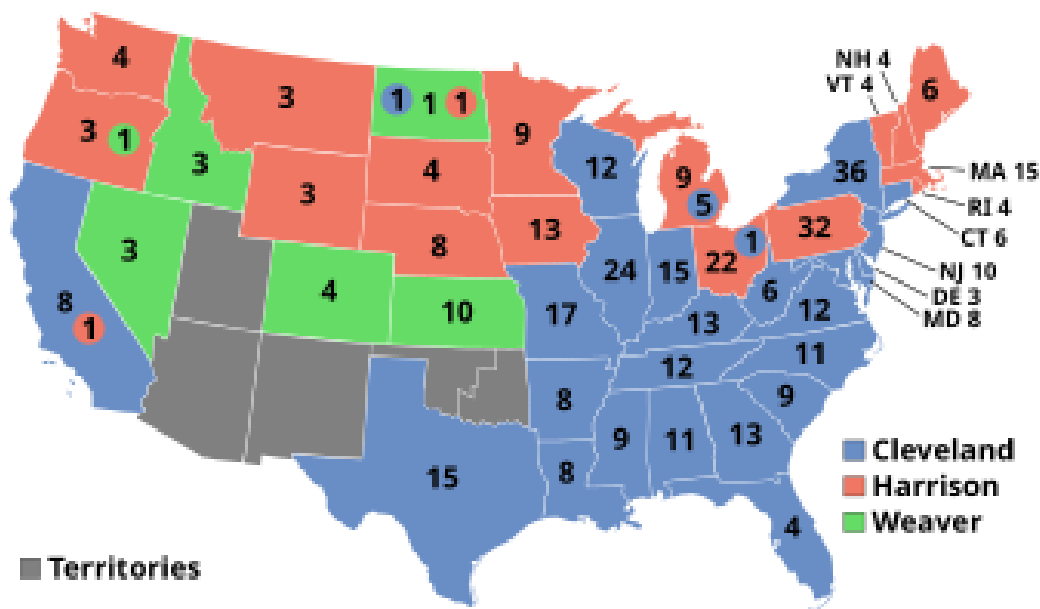
The legacies of President Cleveland's first administration are his support for labor and the involvement of government in resolving labor disputes. In an effort to address concerns over railroad rates and policies, he signed the Interstate Commerce Commission into law with the intention that it would regulate fairness by the different carriers of our expanding railroad network.

He also signed the Dawes Act with the expectation that this law would provide land to Native Americans, enable them to assimilate into American culture, and honor them. He expanded the powers of the presidency by challenging the constitutionality of the Tenure of Office Act (1867) which led to the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. He also expanded the jobs requiring the Civil Service Exam and established the Department of Labor. President Cleveland accepted the gift of the Statue of Liberty from France and placed it in New York Harbor as a national symbol in support of immigration.

His presidency was criticized for his veto of military pensions to veterans of the Civil War. He also vetoed the Dependent Pension Bill which would give pensions to anyone who served more than 90 days in the military. He appointed Melville W. Fuller, as Chief Justice and Lucius Q.C. Lamar, his Secretary of the Interior, to the U.S. Supreme Court. Both were conservatives who opposed government regulation, an income tax, and racial segregation. (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) President Cleveland signed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1888 prohibiting Chinese immigrants who returned to China from returning to the United States. His marriage to 21 year old Frances Folsom from Buffalo was both criticized and celebrated in the media.

President Cleveland lost the election of 1888 to Benjamin Harrison. The issues focused on the economy, immigration, and race. Although Grover Cleveland won the popular vote, Benjamin Harrison won the vote in the electoral college. Benjamin Harrison is the grandson of President William Henry Harrison. The campaign was influenced by foreign influence (Britain), a fake letter (Murchison Letter), and buying votes in Indiana.

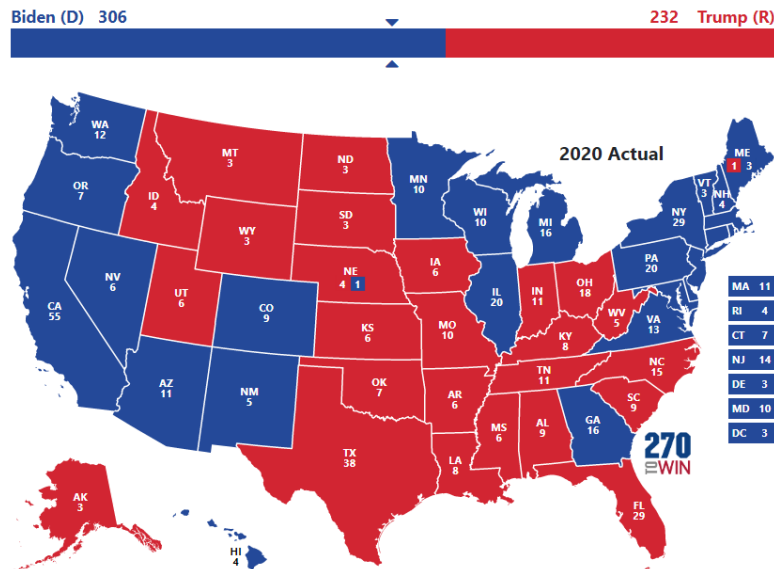
Grover Cleveland received the nomination of the Democratic Party in 1892 for the third time. President Benjamin Harrison received the nomination of the Republican Party and James Weaver was the nominee for the Populist Party. The economy was the major issue regarding the tariff, currency, and the national debt. Cleveland won the election with 46% of the votes, Harrison received 43%, and Weaver 9%. This was the first time an incumbent Republican president lost re-election.



President Cleveland's second term began with his withdrawal of the treaty to annex Hawaii before the Senate had a chance to ratify it. In the month following his inauguration U.S. gold reserves fell below \$100 million. This was one of the causes of the Panic of 1893 which began in May. After being president for only two months, he had surgery to remove a malignant growth in his mouth. The surgery was kept secret from the public and took place on a yacht in New York's East River. The public was told he was taking a fishing trip from New York to Cape Cod. During his second term, Jacob Coxey led 500 unemployed workers in a march to Washington, D.C.

Cleveland supported gold over silver and paper currency. He also argued for lower tariffs. Congress repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act but the public did not purchase enough government bonds to fund the purchase of gold reserves. After three failed attempts, J.P. Morgan organized a syndicate to fund the government preventing a default. Eugene Debs, president of the American Railway Union, organized a strike that affected most of the nation. President Cleveland in a bold move sent federal troops to Chicago to arrest the strikers and end the strike. [Proclamation Regarding the Railroad Strike](#) Congress passed the Wilson-Gorman Tariff which included a 2 percent personal income tax on incomes greater than \$4,000. The U.S. Supreme Court would nullify this income tax. In the area of foreign policy, Cleveland had to address a revolution in Cuba against Spanish rule and a boundary dispute between Venezuela and Great Britain.

Donald Trump was born in Queens, New York and was a businessman before becoming a political leader. On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump will become the second president to be re-elected after being defeated after his first term. Donald Trump was the oldest president inaugurated in 2017 at the age of 70 and Joseph Biden became the oldest president at age 78 when he was inaugurated in 2021. However, Donald Trump was technically a few months older than Biden when he was re-elected to a second term in 2025 and has been elected to office twice as our oldest president. He lost the popular vote in 2016 but received a majority of the popular vote in 2024. In 2017 the Republicans controlled both houses of Congress in addition to the presidency. Indictments were issued to 13 Russians for interfering in the 2016 election and two of his close advisors were charged with violating campaign finance laws and fraud. In 2025, the Republicans only controlled the Senate.



President Trump's first term began with the largest women's march in American history when millions of people in the United States and around the world protested his policies against women. His first official acts as president were to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, ban travel from several Arab countries in the Middle East, close the southern border and appoint Neil Gorsuch, a conservative, to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2020, The Senate ratifies the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), which replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Within his first 100 days he ended most clean energy protections to reduce carbon emissions from President Obama's administration, including the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Change Agreement. A rally of white nationalists and neo-Nazis held a large rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in the summer of President Trump's first year. A young woman died when violence developed. Although President Trump denounced the violence, he did not condemn the attack or object to the actions of white supremacists.

His landmark legacy was a revision of the federal tax code which simplified the reporting of federal income taxes and offered tax cuts to most Americans. The Tax Cut and Jobs Act provided a short-term revision of the tax code favoring businesses and wealthier Americans for a period of only nine years. (2026). On the one-year anniversary of his presidency, he announced a 30 to 50 percent tariff on several items manufactured in China. He also ended the agreement between the United States and Iran on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. On the 80th anniversary of the independence of Israel, President Trump announced that the American embassy would be relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In 2019 he announced the U.S. Space Command which is responsible for U.S. military operations in space. In a move contrary to U.S. foreign policy, President Trump met with Kim Jong-un of North Korea at a highly publicized summit meeting in Singapore.

He was criticized for his decision to separate almost 2,000 children from their parents who crossed the southern border illegally. Parents were detained by immigration officials and children were bused to homes in different cities. The policy ended about two months after it started. The federal government was temporarily shut down for 35 days when Congress and the President could not agree on extending the national debt to include funding a border wall. In his summit meeting with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland, President Trump declined to speak out against Russian involvement in the 2016 election. The midterm elections shifted the Congress and the Senate to the Democratic Party. The 116th Congress include more than 100 women and the first Native American and Muslim women representatives.

The newly elected Democratic Congress began televised impeachment hearings in August 2019 regarding an alleged issue of a phone call between President Trump and President Zelensky in Ukraine regarding pressure to obtain information that would be embarrassing to former Vice-President Joe Biden. The House of Representatives impeached President Trump in December. The Senate voted to acquit President Trump on the charges of abuse of power and obstruction of justice.

The United States killed General Soleimani of Iran on January 3, 2020. Iran retaliated with missile attacks on two U.S. military bases in Iraq. There were no deaths. Perhaps the most significant event for the Trump presidency was the news of an outbreak of a new and deadly coronavirus, Covid-19, from China. The outbreak was worldwide and the United States issued travel bans, closed schools and non-essential businesses. By the end of March, the government declared Covid-19 as a national emergency leading to the unemployment of 22 million workers. In June, President Trump began challenging the advice of the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and held an indoor political rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There was disagreement and confusion about requirements to wear masks during the pandemic and how effectively the government was addressing the crisis. In the summer, the government expanded economic relief through extended unemployment benefits, suspension of student loan payments, and a payroll tax holiday. A vaccine was approved in December 2020 and became available to the public in February 2021.

In the weeks before the presidential election on November 3, 2020, President Trump, his wife, and numerous White House officials tested positive for the Covid-19 virus, President Trump was hospitalized. The *New York Times* reported that President Trump paid no federal income taxes for ten years between 2000 and 2015. Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg died and President Trump nominated Amy Coney Barret, a conservative Federal Appeal Court Judge, as her successor. She was confirmed within four days.

President Trump challenged the results of the 2020 Election because of the unprecedented number of mail-in ballots due to Covid-19. Although President Trump lost the popular vote and the electoral college, he did not want to accept the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court rejecting all claims of voter fraud in the election. On January 6, 2021, the day that the Congress was meeting to certify the results of the election and officially accept Joseph Biden as the 46th president, a violent mob attacked the U.S. Capitol. A U.S. Capitol police officer and a violent protestor died during the riot. The House of Representatives impeached President Trump for "Incitement of insurrection" one week later on January 13. President Trump became the first president to be impeached twice while in office. On January 20, 2021 President Trump and his family left the White House to go to Florida. He was the first president since 1869 to not attend his successor's inauguration.

Questions:

1. Are there any similarities between the campaigns and administrations of Grover Cleveland and Donald Trump?
2. Why did Grover Cleveland lose to Benjamin Harrison in 1888?
3. Why did Grover Cleveland win re-election in 1894 after losing to Benjamin Harrison in 1892?
4. What were the major challenges Grover Cleveland had as president in both his administrations?
5. Why did Donald Trump lose to Joseph Biden in 2020?
6. What were the major challenges Donald Trump had as president in his first administration?
7. Based on the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, what might we expect in his next term of office beginning in January 2025?
8. Will women likely organize a protest march to protest the anti-women rhetoric and actions of President Trump and the Republicans? Is there a more effective way for them to have their voice heard?
9. What will likely be the biggest challenge preventing Donald Trump from implementing his promises to the American people?
10. How do you view the administration of President Joseph Biden? Was the re-election of Donald Trump primarily the result of effective campaign strategies by him or the desire for change from the administration of President Biden?